

## **Psittacosis**

Agent: *Chlamydia psittaci* (bacteria)

Mode of Transmission: Transmission usually occurs when a person inhales organisms that have been aerosolized from dried feces or respiratory tract secretions of infected birds. Other means of exposure include mouth-to-beak contact and handling of feathers or tissues from infected birds.

Signs/Symptoms: Most commonly fever, headache, weakness, muscle aches, chills, and nonproductive cough. The severity of the disease ranges from a mild, non-specific influenza-like illness to a systemic illness with severe pneumonia. With appropriate treatment, the infection is rarely fatal.

Prevention: Preventive measures include proper design and management of facilities that raise and sell birds and use of protective clothing (e.g., wearing of masks or respirators and gloves) by those working with birds confirmed with avian chlamydiosis or birds exposed to confirmed avian cases. Bird cages should be cleaned regularly with disinfectants and the contents of the cage should be disposed of properly. People who work with birds or have birds as companion animals who experience symptoms compatible with psittacosis should bring this potential exposure to their healthcare provider's attention.

Other Important Information: Birds may or may not show signs of illness when infected. The severity of clinical illness in humans can range from subtle upper respiratory disease or mild conjunctivitis to death and depends on the virulence of the particular *Chlamydia* strain and the immune status of the host. Chlamydial organisms have been isolated from over 460 bird species, but are most commonly identified in psittacine (parrot-type) birds, especially cockatiels and budgerigars (also called parakeets or budgies). Among caged, nonsittacine birds, infection with *C. psittaci* occurs most frequently in pigeons and doves. People who raise, sell or keep birds should consult with a licensed veterinarian about protocols and best practices for preventing and treating avian psittacosis.

No cases of psittacosis were reported in Virginia during 2016. The most recent psittacosis case was reported in 2003.